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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR M, A, DS, EUR, HR, CA, RM, OBO, EUR-IO/EX  
FRANKFURT ALSO FOR RIMC AND RSC  
AMEMBASSY MINSK SENDS

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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [APER](#) [CMGT](#) [PREL](#) [ABUD](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: BELARUS: STATUS OF EMBASSY OPERATIONS

#### Summary and Introduction

1. (SBU) All but four of Embassy Minsk's 35 State and other agency Americans departed post in two phases -- March 27 and May 3, 2008 -- as a result of demands by the GOB, lashing out in response to expanded USG economic sanctions. One of our highest priorities is maintaining the employment of our Belarusian staff, who are under inordinate pressure from the dictatorial regime and who would be blocked from other employment if we were forced to let them go. This message provides a status report of current mission operations, detailing our tasks, organization, savings and cuts, in an effort to establish a baseline for our colleagues in Washington and elsewhere. The prospects for increased USDH staffing will be discussed septel. End summary and introduction.

#### USDH Responsibilities: Who Does What (and Where)

2. (SBU) After the last vehicle crossed the Belarusian-Lithuanian border May 3, post was left with four Foreign Service personnel (about a 90 percent cut from previous staffing levels of 35 USDH employees): the Charge/DCM, RSO, Vice Consul, and Facilities Manager. Responsibilities were divided up accordingly:

- 1) Charge/DCM: Front office, POL/ECON
- 2) Vice Consul: Acting Consular Chief, Acting PAO, back-up POL/ECON
- 3) RSO: Security, IM issues, back-up Management Officer
- 4) Facilities Manager: Acting Management Officer, also responsible for GSO, FMO, HR, and FM

3. (SBU) In September, the FM departed, and was replaced by a FS-2 Management Officer, who has received consular training as well. The division of labor remains as before: the arrival of an IMO October 31 -- bringing us to the staffing limit of five imposed by the GOB -- is a very welcome development. Responsibilities are currently divided as follows:

- 1) Charge/DCM: Front office, POL/ECON
- 2) Management Officer: MGT, GSO, FMO, HRO, FM issues, back-up Consul and back-up RSO (has both consular and Post Security Officer training)
- 3) Consul: Consular Chief, PAO, back-up POL/ECON
- 4) RSO: Security issues
- 5) IMO: IM issues, back-up Management Officer

4. (SBU) We essentially abandoned our chancery May 3, having removed or destroyed sensitive or classified materials and equipment over the preceding month. Charge and RSO moved their offices from the Chancery to adjacent annexes on the mission compound; IM operations were moved exclusively to unclassified annex office space.

#### Local Staff (FSNs, LES)

15. (SBU) Before the current crisis began in March 2008, post had 150 local employees. That number has been reduced by about 15 percent to 129, as the result of a range of factors, and we anticipate further decreases. Accusations of treason made by the regime against our surveillance detection (SD) team in March forced them to resign their positions en masse. A few others were fortunate to secure employment with international organizations or immigrate to other countries. A further three FSNs are either on maternity/child care leave or leave without pay. We have one pending request for a Special Immigrant Visa for an FSN with over 15 years' service, and anticipate a few more such requests in early 2009. We are leaving unnecessary positions vacant or abolishing them.

#### Consular Operations

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16. (SBU) We appreciate the continued support of regional posts, especially Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kyiv, and Warsaw, who are taking on the bulk of our NIV applicants, and TDY support from both Moscow and St. Petersburg in our Consul's absence. We continue to take a small number of emergency NIV applications and others in the interest of the USG. Our ACS workload, which includes a very high-profile arrest case, has not waned. We continue to remain in close touch with the small locally-resident AMCIT community.

#### Public Affairs

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17. (SBU) The forced suspension of operations at 12 American Corners across Belarus and a much-reduced number of invitations to attend or participate in regional and Minsk-based events has allowed us to readjust our PAS priorities. We have had great success in

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significantly ramping up our interaction with the independent media, which cover U.S. topics with enthusiasm. Interviews are repeated in multiple publications and are circulated on the internet for broader Belarusian audiences. Cultural programming has not encountered serious obstacles and has been, in fact, encouraged by the MFA in some cases; by realigning PAS resources, we have increased our activity in this sphere, especially by inviting speakers and musicians to Belarus. In a memorable recent week, we combined the visits of a speaker on U.S. presidential debates with a distinguished conductor and hosted multiple events, earning the praise of numerous Belarusian interlocutors.

#### Financial Management

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18. (SBU) Although the Minsk budget is small -- our FSNs' salaries are very low compared to their counterparts elsewhere in EUR -- we have worked with a variety of partners in Washington to cut costs. We volunteered to take a USD 55,000 hit to our program budget in FY 2009, and were able to achieve the following cuts and savings in FY 2008:

- 1) FSN staffing reductions: USD 320,000 annual savings
- 2) Cancellation of short-term leases: USD 361,800 annual savings
- 3) OBO: returned USD 38,000
- 4) Program/representation: returned USD 3,100
- 5) State/MSG: returned USD 22,000
- 6) State/MRV: returned USD 11,200

19. (SBU) As a contingency, we also transferred a number of items to Embassy Vilnius, including USD 60,000 worth of residential furniture and a 2007 Ford minivan.

#### Information Management

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110. (SBU) Post owes a debt of gratitude for support from Embassies Vilnius and Sofia for our IM systems, as well as to RIMC/Frankfurt for TDY support in advance of our colleagues' departure in May. As of April 2008, Minsk can no longer receive or send telegrams. In Minsk, we receive cables through Webgram, and send through Vilnius'

CLOUT. To access classified messages, we travel to Vilnius -- about a five-hour round trip. With a new IMO in place, we look forward to a thorough in-house review of IM operations and to determining how best to manage our efforts in the future.

MOORE  
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